

## CUSTOM MEDICINE IN MOLI DISTRICT, GUADALCANAL

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(Judith Foye is a registered nurse who lives and works in Honolulu, Hawaii. From September to December 1972, she lived at Makaruka, headquarters of the Moro Movement, in the Moli District of Guadalcanal. Judith collected plant specimens and talked with local healers while here husband was involved in the Guadalcanal Weather Coast Project, a study then being undertaken by the East-West Population Institute and the University of Hawaii.)

It is not necessary to stay very long in a Solomon Islands village to see that custom medicine and European medicine exist side by side. There is nothing secret about the use of plants and herbs to cure pains, bites, and infections, and it is well known who are the experienced curers within a particular area. More difficult to understand, however, is the meaning of custom medicine for the people. Why does illness occur? For what illnesses would custom medicine be chosen rather than European medicine? Are there two kinds of disease: custom disease and European disease? The information presented here for the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal does not answer all these questions but has been written down as a way of helping more serious study. This report refers mainly to the Moli District, supplemented by information from other villages between Sughu, Wanderer Bay and Hautahe, Marau Sound.

Prior to arriving on the Weather Coast, great difficulty was anticipated in obtaining information about custom medicines, but instead I found many people quite willing to either share their knowledge or provide the names of those considered to have special experience. Several were very pleased to learn that some Europeans were interested in their art and that some ingredients of their cures might be incorporated into the array of European medicines. Petero Cheni, formerly Assistant District Headman for Tetekanji,

was most eager to have written down before several old men died all that was known about custom medicine for the Tetekanji Bush. Unfortunately it was not possible to visit his village, now Vaturalae on the Sabahalava River, but he and his contemporaries remain a rich source for others seeking this type of information.

Although many people readily spoke about common cures, they were frequently reluctant to discuss all they knew about custom medicine. Some indicated that they charged a fee, usually from 10 to 30 cents, payable if the cure was effective, and that this income would decrease if their methods became more generally known. A local interpreter, either Leoni Pai or Patricio Bubuli of Makaruka, was present during most discussions and might also have been considered such a financial threat. Far more details were given, generally in a whisper, when no fellow villagers were nearby, but with frequent checks to ensure that no one had crept to within hearing. The need for secrecy was stressed for the more delicate topics, such as medicines for abortion, to prevent other people from knowing the details and therefore from using a cure which it was felt ought never be used. Some also said they did not want the source of my information revealed, for fear of reprisals from fellow villagers, religious leaders, and outside Government sources who might consider this to be immoral or illegal.

Discussion here is limited to the type of custom medicines used to cure a variety of physical complaints, as well as those which affect pregnancy and fertility. There are and have been in the past, however, a variety of medicines which were more magical in nature. These include love potions, which Weather Coast people say no longer exist since early missionaries destroyed all the plants used. There are also methods of increasing crop yield, such as yam magic, which is still a source of income for at least one old man in Moli and the chants for which have been compiled by the Tedders (1974:37-52). Some medicines are used strictly to counteract the effects of "bad

magic," which had resulted in physical harm to a person, but these cures often appeared to be identical to the treatment given when the same complaint was not a result of magic. No one interviewed claimed a knowledge of medicines which produced harmful effects. These were described as "poison," two of which (*vele* and *piro*) are feared throughout the Weather Coast. It was generally agreed that "bad magic" was still practised, as reflected in the severe illnesses experienced by some village people.

### The Causes of Illness

Aside from the belief that someone has created "bad magic" to cause an illness, Moli people indicated that they have no firm idea of why illness occurs. Many suggested that the umbilicus was the route of most illnesses. This idea may explain why, at least for internal complaints, some cures described in the following lists include placing the treatment in the navel. Those persons with recent formal education would usually say that diseases were caused by "germs," but upon further questioning showed little understanding of this theory's application to everyday living. One woman, having described a cure for diarrhea in small children, was asked how infants became ill. She said she did not know, but had noticed that when a baby in a village had diarrhea, then shortly all of them would have it. "Bakua", a skin fungus of the ringworm type which is extremely common on the Weather Coast, has been almost eliminated in one village. Its women are most proud of their children's cleanliness and will quickly point this out to expatriate visitors. Because of the amount of "bakua" found in nearby villages, the women in this village appeared to see how cleanliness could affect the number of external complaints their children might suffer.

How Moli people viewed the relationship between custom and European medicine was of great interest but difficult to discover. "Custom medicine" was said



to be capable only of curing "custom disease." However I was told of a cure for Gonorrhea, an introduced disease, but describing this treatment as part of custom medicine is not as inconsistent as might first appear. Individual symptoms are viewed as separate illnesses that must be treated differently, even if they occur at the same time. This means that Moli people can consider diarrhea to be an old disease no matter what its source when viewed in western terms.

The fact that an ill person knows of local cures has some influence on which methods are used and whether custom or European medicine is tried first. If the custom medicine, when tried first, is not effective, then people usually turn next to European medicine. Even though a custom cure might not work in a particular case, nevertheless it would be used again whenever the same symptoms were experienced. Those who became ill but had no direct knowledge of custom medicine might first see a local healer, or they might first go to the nearest health clinic. All Moli villages are within a day's walk of a clinic, but the distance an ill person was from the nearest clinic would certainly influence whether European medicine was sought first or how soon after the failure of a local cure.

The use of custom and European medicines is often combined. Thus one health aide instructs patients who have already visited a local healer to wait a day until being treated with western methods. It was not clear if he felt that two different types of medicine might interfere with one another or whether he wanted it to be clear in peoples' minds just which medicine had been effective. He often prescribed custom medicine for his own family, especially as a preventative, but said he would not do so for his patients. Whenever a person is extremely ill, custom medicine seems to prevail. In one case, no attempt was made to obtain help from the clinic for a child who later died. In another, European medicine was sought initially, but as the child worsened the most prominent local practitioner was called. Older members of the family

also came to help find out the source of the "bad magic" which they were sure was responsible for this illness. The family also rejected the suggestion that the child's fever could be reduced by cooling, but continued instead to question him about the likely source of this spell.

### Knowledge of Custom Medicine

Generally, most adults have some knowledge of custom medicines. Even older children are aware of the usual method for curing "bakua," the skin disease, and how to treat allergic reactions of the skin to certain plants. Older adults, however, seemed more aware of traditional methods. Both males and females over the age of 40 to 50 named several useful cures and only one person considerably less than 40 years of age had a wide knowledge.

Local cures are usually passed on from one family member to another. Although there seems no set pattern for this, many stated they had learned the art from their mother's brother. Other sources were either parents or older persons within their own families. In recent years, it appears that the practice of passing on such information has declined, since the older people explained that they had learned when young yet few of the younger adults knew a great deal about local cures. One middle-aged man was able to provide only one cure but said he had learned many more when younger. However, with no occasion to use them, they had been forgotten.

Often, in an area one practitioner is outstanding, both because of the depth of experience about custom medicine and because of a personal view of the nature of disease. Throughout Moli, Ulea of Komuvaolu, a village near Makaruka, is such a person. Now aged about 45, Ulea was born and lived his childhood in the bush area above Honiara. It was there that he learned to become a traditional healer. While still young he moved to Moli, where he became known for his abilities with custom medicine. In

fact, it was he who was credited with the cure of Moro during his severe illness which lead to the beginning of the Moro Movement (Davenport and Coker 1967:140-2).

At an early age, Ulea learned from his father and brothers the various plants necessary for each type of treatment. When they realized that he had become skilled, his brothers told him the one great secret which characterizes Ulea's art. Although he believes, like many Moli people, that all sickness starts at the umbilicus, he was also taught that serious illness was often caused by the presence of bad blood or the inability of blood to work well in the body. Therefore if someone has bad blood at the same time as a stomach ache, then that stomach ache was caused by bad blood staying in the abdominal area or what might be interpreted loosely as poor circulation.

To determine if an ill person has had blood, Ulea will find a *Lo* vine (unidentified) in the bush. If the vine's stem flows red when cut, then that illness must be caused by bad blood. Ulea will then pound the same stem to obtain a small amount of the liquid, which the ill person drinks with a little water. This medicine is often repeated daily, until Ulea discovers the liquid from the vine stem to be clear, at which time there is no longer bad blood in the patient's body. This same treatment is carried out no matter what part of the body contains bad blood. Ulea is also able to determine whether a person who is seriously ill will either die or live. Again, he will walk into the bush and there be greeted by two spirits. After this, he will soon see a *Lo* vine along his path. If, when the vine is cut, the liquid is red, then the sick person will die. If, however, the stem flows clear, then the patient will live with the help of custom medicine.

Two of Ulea's cures remove aching throughout the body and remedy an acute form of diarrhea (see Internal Illnesses). He did not wish to tell me all his cures, probably because he is highly respected

and often sought by the people as a result of the success of his methods, rather than that he feared some unknown retribution. He claimed no knowledge of drugs such as those causing sterility, which he described as "poisons," and not at all in the realm of medicine. He also seemed surprised that he should have been asked about them.

### Specific Treatments

Details of the various treatments that follow were obtained with the help of several interpreters. The local names for the plants that made up each cure usually were given in the Moli language and sometimes in Poleo. These were spelt out by the interpreter and so are not always consistent. In addition, the name for a particular plant may vary throughout the Weather Coast and for this reason the home village of the informant has been stated. The treatments identified have been grouped into whether the illness was external or internal, or is one that affects pregnancy. In some cases, specific ailments were described by a local term (like *kachila*, a gastric pain) or in Pijin English (such as "clean belly," a preventative against internal disorders). It is not known if or how these cures fit into a Moli or more generally Weather Coast classification of illness and for this reason the following list is presented according to standard Western groupings.

The dosage for custom medicines is given very generally but usually measured by a "spoon" or "big spoon." Children can normally be given the same medicines as adults in smaller amounts, with the practitioner choosing the actual dosage. In the case of small infants who are breastfed, the mother usually takes the normal adult dose for it is generally accepted that the medicine will then pass to the child through the mother's milk. If the infant is able, a very small amount will often be given on a spoon or through a leaf shaped into a funnel. Periods



of time or ages stated in the following cures must also be considered very approximate. Throughout the Weather Coast the people's concept of time revolves around the seasons rather than the Western calendar, while estimates of age are based upon the stage of development (like puberty) that a person has reached.

Wherever possible, the local names for the plants used in each treatment have also been identified by their formal, or botanical names. As many specimens as possible were taken from the Weather Coast to the Herbarium in Honiara. Sometimes specimens were not brought by the person providing the information but were rather gathered by one of the interpreters as a result of seeking a plant with a particular local name. This could be a source of error. In many instances, also, the specimens were inadequate for professional identification.

The help of Mr. K.W. Trenaman, former Conservator of Forests, who made his staff and facilities available, is most appreciated. Barnabas Sirute'e, formerly Herbarium Officer, was most helpful and after my departure from Honiara rechecked the botanical identifications with the assistance of a Weather Coast man. Margaret Tedder and Doug Yen made useful comments upon an earlier draft and Wanda McLure, a fellow project member, kindly lent me her own unpublished paper on custom medicine in Sughu, Wanderer Bay. I would also like to thank Murray Chapman for editing this paper.

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## EXTERNAL APPLICATIONS

### Wounds

LIGE - Pandanus: *Rechingeri martelli*

Put several leaves of this tree into boiling water until soft. Apply softened leaves directly to the wound and tie in place. Informants (2) : Sukiki, Moli, Tina River Valley.

LIGE - Pandanus: *Rechingeri martelli*

Wash wound with salt water.

Stroke young leaf of this tree over the wound and then tie in place.

Do this twice daily while needed.

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

LIGE - Pandanus: *Rechingeri martelli*

Wash wound with salt water.

Stroke over wound with bark of this tree and then tie in place.

Do this twice daily while needed.

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

TAILOVO - Compositae: *Mikania scandens*

To stop bleeding, pound juice from several leaves of the Tailovo.

Without adding water to juice, place directly on open wound and cover with more leaves.

Informant: Sughu, Wanderer Bay

### Wound of long duration

Ingredients: BUA - Palmae: *Areca catechu* (betelnut)

KOERAU - Piperaceae: *Piper* sp.

LIME (made from coral)

Chew the lime and fruit of the Bua.

Place the mixture that results on a rolled leaf of the Koerau.

Paint the mixture over the affected area.

Words are necessary with the application.

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

### Centipede bite

NURE - Moraceae: *Ficus edelfeltii*

Place piece of bark of this tree over area that has been bitten.

Tie in place and leave for about one day to reduce pain and swelling.

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

### Snakebite

TIMBER, rotten and decaying from any tree.

Take one spoonful within five minutes after being bitten to prevent death.

One particular snake is always considered fatal and this cure will not work if a person is bitten by that.

Informant: Vatumanivo, Malagheti.

### Sore inside nose

Ingredients: TALA - Gesneriaceae: *Vitex trifolia*

GOVU GOVU - Goodeniaceae: *Scaevola faccada*

Wrap one young leaf of both Tala and Govu Govu in another leaf and heat over a fire.

Squeeze the leaves into water onto a spoon and drink.

Take this medicine only once.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

### Open wounds or boils

SABAHA - Apocynaceae: *Alstonia scholaris*

Scrape bark of Sabaha and place in leaf cone.

Add water and squeeze out liquid. Place liquid on wound.

Informant: Aona, Koloula River Valley.

### bakua

Skin fungus of the ringworm type, caused by *Tinea umbricata*

RAU VUNI - Leguminosae: *Cassia alata* L.

Bathe, then scrape affected skin with fingernail.

Rub several of these leaves, which have been softened by pounding, on to the affected area.

This is done daily for several weeks until the "bakua" disappears.

Informants: Several sites throughout the Weather Coast. This treatment is encouraged by medical staff in the Solomons, who have found it to be effective, and is also used in several parts of Papua New Guinea (Holdsworth 1975). A coconut husk is suggested in the bathing process rather than "fingernail scraping."

TAUMANA - Dioscoreaceae: *Dioscorea bulbifera*

Scratch the affected area with fingernail until bleeding occurs. Cut fruit of the Taumana into half and rub into "bakua."

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

TAUMANA - Dioscoreaceae: *Dioscorea bulbifera*

Scratch the affected area with fingernail until bleeding occurs.

Rub the leaves of this into the "bakua."

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

## INTERNAL ILLNESSES

### Headaches

ALO NGENGETI - unidentified

Put a young leaf of this vine on to the fire until it turns to ashes.

Put ashes into the nostrils and sniff.

Especially effective for frontal headaches.

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

ARO ARO - Verbenaceae: *Premna corymbosa*

Pound a young leaf to extract the liquid.

Put liquid inside the nostrils and sniff.

This causes a cold feeling in the forehead which reduces the pain.

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

KARO - Zingiberaceae: *Alpinia* sp.

Pound a young leaf to extract the liquid.

Put this liquid inside the nostrils and sniff.

This causes a cold feeling in the forehead which reduces the pain.

Informants (2) : Makaruka, Moli.

### Severe and unceasing headache

MAKALEASO - Zingiberaceae: *Costus speciosus*

Pound 2 to 3 new leaves of Makaleaso and wrap in another leaf.

Place this on the fire to heat and extract the liquid.

Put a small amount of the liquid into the eye on the affected side of the head. (If both sides are affected, then a drop is put in both eyes.) Once should be sufficient for a cure. Medicine may be repeated, but not more than once daily.

Informant: Poleo speaker, Tina River Valley.



Aching throughout the body

HALOMBABAHEA - unidentified.

Rub several of these leaves into shreds with the hands and then inhale.

Informant: Ulea of Komuvaolu, Moli.

Cough

BETIBETI - Leeaceae: *Leea suaveolens*

Remove the outer portion of a branch of Betibeti.

Pound the soft inside portion until some liquid is obtained.

Drink this liquid with water.

Take once and cure occurs in 2 to 3 days.

Informants (2): Makaruka, and Sukiki, Moli.

GOGOMA - unidentified

Finely scrape one spoonful of bark. Drink with water.

Special words are necessary during application.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

GOVU GOVU - Goodeniaceae: *Scaevola faccada*

Squeeze a small portion of bark to obtain enough liquid to make one spoonful.

Drink this with water.

Taken once, the cure will be in 2 to 3 days.

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

KEHAOKA - Annonaceae: *Cananga odorata*

Scrape finely a large spoonful of bark from this tree.

Mix with water and drink.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

LENGA - Combretaceae: *Terminalia catappa* L.

Scrape finely one spoonful of bark from this tree and drink with water. Special words are necessary to make the medicine effective. If not better after this treatment, then use either Betibeti or Gogoma.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

LIHA - unidentified

Pound young roots to collect enough liquid to make a spoonful. Add to water and drink.

Take once and cure is in 2 to 3 days.

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

### Constipation of infant

LENGA - Combretaceae: *Terminalia catappa* L.

Wrap one young leaf in another. Put on fire for a short time. Remove the inside, heated leaf and crush to obtain liquid. Add a small amount of water and give to baby to drink.

May be taken two to three times a day if necessary.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

### Diarrhea

BURUBURU - Euphorbiaceae: *Euphorbia hirta*

Mix a small piece of the fruit of this "grass" into a small child's food.

An adult may eat "a few."

Do once daily for as long as necessary.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli. Similar treatment reported for Sughu, Wanderer Bay.

KALAKU - Pandanus: *Compressus martelli*

Burn a branch on a fire to remove the outside.

Crush the inside to extract the juice and drink.

Dosage for an infant is one small spoonful, for an adult half a cup.

May be taken three times daily, if necessary, to control the diarrhea.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

KALAKU - Pandanus: *Compressus martelli*

Heat the root of a young tree on the fire.

Pound the heated root with a stone to extract the liquid.

One spoonful is taken by the mother of a nursing child

to cure the infant's diarrhea. Dosage for adults is one spoonful.

Medicine is taken twice daily until diarrhea no longer exists.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

LANGOLANGOTIKACHA - Gramineae: *Paspalum conjugatum* Berg (introduced plant)

Rub two leaves of this "grass" on to the abdomen with one or two downward strokes.

Use two more leaves and repeat the process on the second day.

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

LANGOLANGOTIKACHA - Gramineae: *Paspalum conjugatum* Berg (introduced plant)

Extract the juice of three leaves by pounding.

Drink with water once daily for two days.

Dosage is the same for both adults and children.

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

#### Diarrhea with blood and/or mucous

KAMBA - Compositae: *Wedelia biflora* (introduced plant)  
Crush the root to obtain one half cup of liquid, and then drink.

Practitioner claims this works on first taking the medicine.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

#### Red stool or painful "red and white" stool, diarrhea; and/or hematuria

A disease in which the patient may die in 3 to 4 days if not cured.

TITA - Chrysolalacea: *Parinari glaberrima*

Scrape a small amount of bark from this tree. Mix with water, and drink.

MATAMATAVURIA - unidentified

Wrap one leaf inside another and heat in a fire. Put the inner warm leaf in the umbilicus and leave in place a short time.

MATAMATAVURIA - unidentified

Place the ripe fruit and press it into the navel so that the juice comes out. Leave in place a short time.

Any of the above cures may be repeated on successive days. If the first cure tried does not work, then another one will be used.

Informant: Ulea of Komuvaolu, Moli.

### Abdominal complaints

#### Taumana

A disease in which there is pain in the center of the abdomen, accompanied by a desire to eat only sweet foods and to drink liquids, otherwise anorexic.

Ingredients: KAKAKE - unidentified

LIME (made from burned coral)

SONGSONG - Urticaceae: *Laportea ruderlaris*

TAUMANA - Dioscoreaceae: *Dioscorea bulbifera*

Take one leaf each of Kakake, Songsong and Taumana.

Crush these and mix with lime.

Use the thumb to press this mixture deep into the navel.

The patient must not eat sweet food and drink only small amounts of water.

Informants (4): Makaruka (3) and Sukiki, Moli (1).

#### Kachila

A disease in which there is epigastric pain and swelling in the upper left quarter of the abdomen.

Ingredients: ALO CHIAME - Convolvulaceae: *Ipomoea learii*

HOVAHOVA - Piperaceae: *Piper* sp.



Take one leaf each from the Hovahova and Alo Chiame. Crush together and rub into the abdomen while speaking special words.

Informants (3): Makaruka, Moli.

Place two hands on the abdomen and massage lightly while speaking special words.

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

#### Hard abdomen on child

NANURE - Leguminosae: *Desmodium umbellatum*

Wrap two young leaves inside another leaf and heat them on a fire.

Crush the contents of this "package" and place in a funnel made from leaves.

Pour a small amount of water through the funnel to make one small spoonful of medicine.

Give the medicine three times a day if necessary.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

#### White tongue on baby

BIRO - Labitae: *Coleus scutellarioides*

Heat one young leaf inside another over a fire.

Crush the inside leaf onto a spoon and add water.

Give to the child to drink.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

#### Fevers

##### Fever in Babies

ACHIGALAVA - unidentified

Before preparing this medicine, special words must be recited.

Next finely scrape the bark and mix with water.

Mother takes a spoonful of mixture herself for a child being nursed. An older child will also drink a small amount.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

HAIMARAO - unidentified

Before this medicine is prepared, special words must be recited.

Then finely scrape the bark of this tree and mix with water.

Dosage is one spoonful. Mother takes internally if child is too young.

If an older baby, give a small amount of the mixture to the baby and also a spoonful to the mother.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

TUVA - unidentified

Special words necessary for this medicine must be said before it is prepared.

Then scrape about one spoonful from the roots of this vine and mix with water.

Dose taken by mother only for a small infant; older babies drink a small amount and the mother also takes a "major portion."

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

#### Fever in infants of long duration

CHINGE - Convolvulaceae: *Ipomoea learii* (Poleo word; probably Alo Chiame in Moli).

Crush one small leaf of this vine until liquid.

Put hot stone or hot knife into it to heat, and have baby drink it.

If this does not work the first time, another medicine must be tried.

Informant: Poleo-speaker, Tina River Valley.

Fever in child which recurs only at night or mornings

(described to be malaria)

NDAI - Moraceae: *Ficus storckii*

For fevers that occur in the morning, scrape the west side of this tree to obtain a small amount of bark.

Pound this into a juice. Heat with hot implement and give to child to drink.

Bark must be collected in the morning and medicine given the same morning.

If fever occurs only at night, then the scrapings of bark must be taken at night from the east side of the tree and medicine must be taken the same night.

Informant: Poleo-speaker, Tina River Valley.

#### Mabo

A disease that especially affects women and has a foul smell that others can notice from a distance. Woman complains of difficult and painful urination, with purulent discharge from the vagina. A man may also have the same symptoms genitally. In either sex, the bowel movement is red (possibly with blood) and is especially foul smelling. Illness did not cause sterility in women but they were said to have difficulty in childbirth. The English name for this disease was said to be Gonorrhea. A strong piece of driftwood is burned and its ashes boiled in a large amount of water. When the ashes are settling, the water is removed and drunk by the patient.

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

#### Cure-all

HAIVOHA - unidentified (aromatic. Smell like sassafras)  
Chew small pieces of the bark of this tree at any time necessary.

RIA - Zingiberaceae

Ill person chews small amounts of the root at any time.

RIA - Zingiberaceae

Small amounts of the root are chewed by anyone, who then spits it upon the patient to achieve a cure. May be done frequently.

Informant for all three: Makaruka, Moli.

## Preventatives

### Make One Strong and Prevent Illness

HAIVOHA - unidentified

Chew small pieces of bark at any time. May be chewed with Ria (see above).

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

RIA - Zingiberaceae

Chew small pieces of root at any time. May be chewed with Haivoha (see above).

Informant: Makaruka, Moli.

### Prevent Intestinal Problems in a Newborn

#### "Clean Belly"

LAM - Aristolochiaceae: *Aristolochia tagala*

Remove the outside of the root of this vine.

Take the cleaned root and place it into a funnel made from any leaf.

Pour an undetermined amount of water through the funnel and over the root. Collect this liquid.

The mother of a baby 3 to 4 days old drinks this once only.

(He believes many people use this as a cure once an intestinal problem occurs, but says he and his mother's brother successfully use it to prevent such problems).

Informant: Poleo-speaker, Tina River Valley.

#### "Protect Infant from the Devil"

VASA - Verbenaceae: *Vitex coffassus*

Use a shell to scrape some bark from one side of this tree.

Collect these scrapings in a Vasa leaf and place the leaf at the foot of the tree below the side that has been scraped.

Go to the next of the four sides of the tree and scrape the bark into a second leaf in the same way. Place



this leaf at the foot of the side that has been scraped. Do this on all four sides of the tree. Finally place all the scrapings into the second leaf.

Make a funnel out of this second leaf and pour water through all the scrapings in it. Give two drops to the child and the rest to the mother to drink.

Informant: Poleo-speaker, Tina River Valley.

### MEDICINES AFFECTING PREGNANCY

To obtain information about medicines that affect pregnancy was more difficult than for any other local treatments. Most details were obtained by my husband, who was able to talk in more depth with many of the Moli men. In addition, since many men speak pijin, some of his discussions did not include an interpreter.

Descriptions of abortifacients were especially difficult to collect. In many cases, men who possessed such knowledge stated they did not use it, even when asked by various women from other villages. Only one young man in the area was said to be giving treatments to cause an abortion, but he refused to answer any questions. Men sometimes claimed that they were not personally aware of any abortifacient but had heard that such custom medicines existed. Some later returned with details, after a promise that their names would not be recorded.

All women questioned denied any knowledge of a local treatment that could affect pregnancy, and especially that abortifacients do and ever did exist. Several older men said they were sure women knew how to prevent pregnancy or caused an abortion. It is not possible to say, however, whether their views were based on actual cases or resulted from their observation that some women were barren or often had miscarriages. Nevertheless, except for one report obtained in Malagheti, all the methods that affect pregnancy were described by men rather than by women.

By contrast, it was the women who were given these custom medicines. No local treatments were described that might render a man sterile, or more potent, and it appears that none previously existed. In the past, perhaps not too distant, some young girls were given medicine from before puberty to prevent them from ever becoming pregnant. One reason for this was the intention that the girl be used for prostitution. Local cures existed to reverse this sterility, if desired once the girl reached adulthood, but no one in Moli could remember the ingredients. Details of how Weather Coast people both space and limit their number of children are contained in *Tasi Mauri*, the report of the Guadalcanal Weather Coast Project (Foye and Tanner, 1974).

#### Fertility medicines

Ingredients: PURE - Acanthaceae: *Pseudenantheum* sp.  
Nest of the Chole Bird - unidentified  
Unknown vine

The new growth is taken from the Pure tree and placed inside the nest of the Chole bird and both of these are wrapped in another vine, whose name is unknown. The husband then places all this in an area where the woman will walk over it. After she has done so, he takes it to the head of a spring. Special words are necessary while he places it in the spring. The woman will then become pregnant. This method is generally used if no "bad poison" is suspected of having been used against the woman.

Informant: Bokasughu, Moli.

#### Cure for a woman "poisoned" by custom medicine causing sterility

Although difficult to verify, it appears that if a woman does not conceive, then it is believed that some medicine has caused this rather than any physical problem.

Ingredients: BALE - unidentified

KONGA - Tiliaceae: *Trichospermum psilocladum*

LO - unidentified

BULBULMISO - unidentified

Day 1 - The woman is given bark from the Bale: one large spoonful finely scraped and mixed with water. This is taken to clean the womb.

Day 2 - The woman is given about one large spoonful of bark from the Konga, which she drinks mixed with water.

Day 3 - Liquid is obtained from the Lo vine, by pounding the stem with a stone. This will appear red at first and about one spoonful is taken by the woman. Obtaining liquid from the vine is repeated at intervals of one week, then two weeks, and then one month, until it no longer flows red. Then the woman is no longer poisoned.

After it has been established that the woman is no longer carrying the poison and she has had her first menstrual period, she returns for more medicine. Some leaves of the Bulbulmiso are squeezed and the juice from them mixed with water. She drinks this; the purpose is to stop the menstrual flow. If the menstrual flow lasts only three days, then the woman will become pregnant. If, however, it lasts four or more days, then no pregnancy will result. In this case, the leaves of the Bulbulmiso will be repeated during each menstrual period until she becomes pregnant. However, the local healer had the utmost confidence in the treatment working the first time.  
Informant: Komuvaolu, Moli.

#### Abortifacients and pregnancy preventatives

Ingredients: PAPACHO - Zingiberaceae: *Curcuma longa*

CHOCHORE - Urticaceae: *Pipturus argenteus*

HORADE - Apocynaceae: *Alstonia spectabilis*

MADALI (Alo Madali) - unidentified

A pregnant woman eats a piece of Papacho root, about one quarter to one half in diameter, several days in one week. This is meant to kill the fetus. She then drinks about one tablespoon of liquid squeezed from the Chochore bark, one spoonful of liquid from the Horade bark, and one spoonful crushed from the stem of Alo Madali. Taken together, these three liquids cause the actual expulsion of the fetus. Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

Ingredients: RIA - Zingiberaceae (ginger variety)

CHOCHORE - Urticaceae: *Pipturus argenteus*

HORADE - Apocynaceae: *Alstonia spectabilis*

MADALI (Alo Madali) - unidentified

A pregnant woman eats a piece of Ria root, about half to one inch in diameter, once or twice a day for one week. This will cause the fetus to die and should also cause its expulsion. Should the actual abortion not occur, then the woman drinks the three liquids listed in the above treatment.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

KONGA - Tiliaceae: *Trichospermum psilocladum*

(Also used as a fertility medicine)

In early pregnancy only, the bark of the Konga is put in water (perhaps with the liquid extracted first) and the woman drinks about one large spoonful.

Special words are necessary, and she will abort in three days. This was explained to be the method used by a man who does not want the woman to be pregnant, possibly without her awareness.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

ALO VINAVINATO - unidentified

A small amount of liquid is drained from the stem of the Vinavinato vine and drunk by the woman, shortly after suspected conception, to cause abortion.

Informant: Bokasughu, Moli.



Ingredients: AL VIOTA - Urticaceae: *Pipturus repandus*  
MAUMAURI - Urticaceae: *Elatostema*

After a woman has missed a menstrual period, she takes one leaf of the Maumauri and one leaf of two types of Al Viota (one has a green underside and the other a red underside).

These three leaves are crushed to obtain liquid, which is mixed with water for the woman to drink.

This treatment was described as a pregnancy preventative, but could well be termed an abortifacient.

Informant: Bokasughu, Moli.

RIA - Zingiberaceae (ginger variety)

In this case the Ria is known as a "poison" and not actually a custom medicine. It would be used to cause sterility in a woman without her knowledge. The actual method or portion of the plant used is not known. Cures exist to restore fertility (see second entry under Fertility Medicines).

Informants: Generally known in this inaccurate form.

VALA - Barringtoniaceae: *Barringtonia novae-hyberniae*

This was used when a parent decided that a female child should never bear children. Treatment began when the child was 5 or 6 years of age, well before the onset of puberty.

A small amount of bark is scraped from the Vala tree. The tree chosen must have no branches. The scrapings are put into water and given to the child to drink. Special words are necessary when the medicine is taken.

Another dose of the medicine is given the child when "she develops breasts." There is a medicine to counteract this, but no one knew the ingredients.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

RIA - Zingiberaceae

This is used by a woman who feels she has enough children and wants no more. After the birth of her last child, she eats a portion of this root daily

for one week. She does not cohabit with her husband for 3 to 4 months. After this time, she may resume sexual activity without fear of becoming pregnant again.

Informant: Sukiki, Moli.

PINEAPPLE and LEMON or LIME.

A pregnant woman who wishes to abort, eats a fruit of an unripe pineapple and an unripe lime or lemon. If by any change she does not abort, then she pounds her abdomen with rocks.

Informants: Women in the Malagheti area (the only method obtained from females).

#### REPORTS FROM THE GUADALCANAL WEATHER COAST PROJECT

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- Freeman, Keri, 1973. *Junior Primary Education on Guadalcanal's Weather Coast: A Case Study*. M.A. final paper, University of Hawaii.
- Witt, Eric, 1974. *The Effect of Land Control and Other Factors upon Agricultural Development: A Solomon Islands Case Study*. M.S. thesis, University of Hawaii.

There are copies of all these materials in the Solomon Islands National Library, and the Honiara Public Library also has duplicate copies of most of them.